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General and complete disarmament: implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction

Letter dated 23 July 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to inform you that the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, with the support provided by Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands, has organized The Vilnius Seminar: Advancing the Ottawa Convention in Northern and Eastern Europe, which was held on 8 and 9 June 2004 in Lithuania.

The purpose of the Vilnius Seminar was to discuss all facets of the Convention relevant to the States of northern and eastern Europe, particularly taking stock of progress made and challenges that remain in the pursuit of the Convention's aims in light of its upcoming First Review Conference, which will be held in Nairobi from 29 November to 3 December 2004.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 73 (p) of its fifty-eighth session (see annex).

(*Signed*) Gediminas **Šerkšnys**
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Annex

Advancing the Ottawa Convention in Northern and Eastern Europe: the Vilnius Seminar

8-9 June 2004

Chair's Summary

The Vilnius Seminar – Advancing the Ottawa Convention in Northern and Eastern Europe was held 8-9 June 2004 in the Lithuanian capital. The meeting was convened by H.E. Mr. Antanas Valionis, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania and was held thanks to support provided by Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Vilnius Seminar was chaired by Mr. Evaldas Ignatavičius, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, with the support of the following Co-Chairs: Mr. Jacques Forster of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Lieutenant Colonel (retired) John MacBride of Canada, Ambassador Friedrich Gröning of Germany, Ambassador Carlo Trezza of Italy, Ambassador Steffen Kongstad of Norway and Ambassador Chris Sanders of the Netherlands.

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Representatives of the following States participated in the Vilnius Seminar: Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Thailand, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. Representatives of the following organizations participated in this event: the European Commission (EC), the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Trust Fund for Mine Action and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs (UNDDA), and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

The Vilnius Seminar was preceded on 7 June 2004 by a destruction ceremony at the Pabradė range of the last 340 antipersonnel mines held by Lithuania. Lithuania now has completed implementation of its obligations under Article 4 of the Convention and had done so more than three years in advance of its legally binding deadline to do so.

The seminar was opened with remarks made by H.E. Mr. Antanas Valionis, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, Mr. Jacques Forster, Vice-President of the ICRC, Ambassador Chaiyong Sajipanon of Thailand on behalf of the President of the Fifth Meeting of the States Parties (5MSP), and Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the Council of the Foundation of the GICHD. These speakers noted with satisfaction the leadership of Lithuania as demonstrated by being the first State in the region to join the Convention and through its efforts to advance implementation of it, commended Estonia for having recently acceded to the Convention and emphasised the value of regional efforts like *the Vilnius Seminar* in advancing the core aims of the Convention.

Chair's conclusions

The Chair, Mr. Evaldas Ignatavičius, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, closed *the Vilnius Seminar* by thanking all participants, expressing special gratitude to his Co-Chairs for their support. He noted that *the Vilnius Seminar* had lived up to its promise as a vibrant forum for States in Northern and Eastern Europe to discuss progress made and challenges that remain in pursuing the aims of the Convention. He drew the following conclusions from the discussions that had taken place during the seminar:

- Significant progress has been made to date in destroying stockpiled antipersonnel mines, clearing mined and UXO contaminated areas, assisting the victims, and pursuing universal acceptance of the Convention. However, much more needs to be done. States in Northern and Eastern Europe can play a significant role in overcoming ongoing challenges, by contributing to mine action, by ratifying or acceding to the Convention and by implementing this important humanitarian instrument, in part by acting quickly to destroy stockpiled mines.

- Stockpile destruction is a particularly important area of implementation for States in Northern and Eastern Europe, particularly given the challenges posed by the destruction of PFM-1 mines. Financing the destruction of these and other mines is a matter that all donors should consider. In addition States not parties should consider proceeding with stockpile destruction.

- States in Northern and Eastern Europe which have not yet joined the Convention should take due note of the experience of the States Parties in fulfilling national security responsibilities without antipersonnel mines.

- States parties – and even some States not parties – particularly in Northern and Eastern Europe – have been leaders in acting upon the Convention's imperative to be transparent in implementation in accordance with Article 7. They should continue to do so and encourage others to do the same, particularly in advance of the Convention's First Review Conference.

- The need to undertake national implementation measures in accordance with Article 9 is an important area for follow-up. In advance of the Nairobi Summit, States parties should examine the full range of legal and other measures that can and should be taken in accordance with this Article, making full use of the assistance offered by the ICRC and examples provided by States Parties.

- Cooperation and assistance to fulfil the Convention's aims is a two-way street. While States in Northern and Eastern Europe in a position to do so are encouraged to examine how they can renew commitments to provide assistance, those requiring assistance must increasingly make national financial and other commitments to assume full ownership over their landmine problems. Efforts should continue to implement the United Nations Mine Action Strategy 2001-2005 and to further develop and implement the European Union's 2005-2007 strategy.

- In addition to pursuing universal acceptance and full implementation of the Ottawa Convention, States should proceed with ratification of the Protocol V to the CCW and continue to participate actively in ongoing discussions in the CCW to address the humanitarian impact of certain conventional weapons which may be excessively injurious or have indiscriminate effects. It is encouraging that many States have indicated a desire that Protocol V enter into force as soon as possible – a matter that is extremely relevant for a region in which many countries face serious challenges associated with unexploded ordnance.

- *The Vilnius Seminar* was significant in preparing for the Nairobi Summit and it highlighted the importance of the Summit in drawing world attention to the landmine problem, the progress that has been made in addressing it and the actions that must be taken to overcome ongoing challenges. *The Vilnius Seminar* has provided an important regional contribution to the Nairobi Summit on the part of States in Northern and Eastern Europe.